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Beverly Eaves Perdue
Governor

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Dee Freeman
Secretary, DENR

HIKING STILL TOP ACTIVITY IN PARKS

Hiking is still king in North Carolina state parks. That's one of the revelations in a new, informal survey of state residents conducted during the state parks system's update of its five-year plan.

The survey also reveals overwhelming public support for adding new parks and more recreational facilities, and for the system's commitment to protecting natural resources.

Hiking trails topped the list of the most popular state park facilities, with 79.5 percent of respondents stating they use the trails. Close behind were nature trails at 74.1 percent.

Among 25 types of facilities listed, other popular ones (along with percent of respondents that would use) are: picnic table with grill (68.4 percent); multi-use trail (61.2 percent); observation decks (61 percent); paddle trails and river access (55.5 percent); picnic shelters (53.9 percent) and educational exhibits (50.7 percent).

Other uses in the survey were: equestrian trails (34.9 percent), RV campsites with utilities (40.5 percent), and



GOV. BEVERLY PERDUE SIGNS LEGISLATION FORMALLY AUTHORIZING GRANDFATHER MOUNTAIN STATE PARK ACCOMPANIED BY DEE FREEMAN, SECRETARY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES, AT LEFT, AND LEGISLATIVE SPONSORS.

PARK AT GRANDFATHER GETS FINAL APPROVAL

The formal authorization of Grandfather Mountain State Park proceeded unanimously through the N.C. General Assembly and was signed into law March 31 by Governor Beverly Perdue.

This step gives the newest state park its name and clears the way for the purchase of 2,456 acres along the crest of the famous mountain as the first property to be dedicated to the state park.

Perdue signed the au-

thorization bill in the chambers of the historic Capitol building accompanied by legislators, division staff, members of the Morton family and a class of fourth grade schoolchildren.

"The creation of a signature state park at Grandfather Mountain is a big step in adding to the quality of life and beauty of our great state while we also preserve North Carolina's spectacular public lands for future generations," Perdue

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Department of Environment and Natural Resources

UP CLOSE AND 'PERSONNEL'

Lawrence Barnwell is a new maintenance mechanic at Chimney Rock State Park. He is a graduate of West Henderson High School and most recently worked for the N.C. Division of Forest Resources

at DuPont State Forest and the Henderson County Parks and Recreation Department.

Jack Singley is a new ranger at William B. Umstead State Park. He is a graduate of Appalachian State University

with a bachelor's degree in history and recreation management and was a seasonal employee on the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Christina Cucurullo joined the north district staff as office assistant. She is a graduate of Millbrook High School in Raleigh, studied at East Carolina University and worked for more than five years as a seasonal employee, general utility worker and office assistant at Falls Lake State Recreation Area.

Mark Girmann joined the staff at Kerr Lake State Recreation Area as a ranger. Formerly a resident of Transylvania County, he holds an associate's degree from Muskingum Technical College in Ohio. He has been self-employed and was formerly a supervisor for the Hamilton County Parks Department in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Daniel Schewlakow is a new ranger at William B. Umstead State Park. He holds a bachelor's degree in biology from Richard Stockton College in New Jersey and previously worked as an environmental researcher and substitute teacher.

Gary Pippin was promoted from general utility worker to maintenance mechanic at Hanging Rock State Park. He previously worked for 27 years as a police detective in Delanco, N.J. and is certified in medical first response and search and rescue tactics.

Susan Chappell joined the staff of Gorges State Park as an office assistant. She is a graduate of Brevard High School and Blue Ridge Community College and has more than 20 years experience as an administrative assistant at Brevard College.

From The Director's Desk

Every so often there's evidence that the more things change, the more they stay the same. An example is the results of an online survey reported elsewhere in The Steward that helped us prepare an update of our five-year Systemwide Plan. Despite plenty of new recreational pursuits, we find that simple hiking – a core experience in our parks – is still the number one activity, with 79.5 percent of visitors using the trails.

Part of the purpose of the Systemwide Plan is to spot trends and find ways to prepare for them. It has proved an extremely useful tool since it was mandated by the General Assembly decades ago, and it has become more important than ever as we add new parks and significantly expand older ones. A good companion tool has been our development of comprehensive master plans for new parks. They set a course for thoughtful development balancing recreation and natural resource protection. Master plans are now being prepared for Chimney Rock, Carvers Creek and Haw River state parks.

On another topic, I had the great honor and pleasure of standing in the Capitol March 31 as Gov. Perdue signed legislation authorizing Grandfather Mountain State Park. Also attending were legislative sponsors as well as Crae Morton and other members of the Morton family. It was an historic moment in an historic spot.

Sen. Joe Sam Queen was the principal sponsor of the senate bill and Phillip Frye, Edgar V. Starnes and Cullie M. Tarleton were principal sponsors in the house, joined by 47 co-sponsors. Furthermore, the vote to establish this newest state park was unanimous. It was truly a vote of confidence in the value of protecting this stunning natural landmark within the state parks system.

We're entering the busiest of seasons with normal concerns about visitor services and safety along with new concerns about our reservations system and a troubled economy. I recognize the economy and significant budget reductions have made managing our parks and other programs very challenging. (An example is the recent cancellation of the May meeting of the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund Authority with decision on local grants deferred until June.) However, I am confident that the professional and dedicated staff of this agency will employ innovation, creativity and unique partnerships to get the job done and provide the best possible service to our visitors.

Sincerely,



Lewis Ledford

FILM SPOTLIGHTS CONSERVATION EFFORT

The story of the conservation of the “World’s Edge” property for Chimney Rock State Park will be the subject of a documentary funded by a Blue Ridge National Heritage Area award.

“Standing on the Edge: Oral Histories of the Saving of World’s Edge” is the project added to the Rutherford County Heritage Plan at the request of the Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy.

Members of that conservancy sounded the alarm when the 1,568-acre tract became threatened with development in 2003, about the time that the N.C. General Assembly authorized a new state park in the Hickory Nut Gorge area.

The conservancy teamed with The Nature Conservancy and subsequently arranged for the property to become the first tract dedicated to the developing Chimney Rock State Park.

The \$5,000 grant will assist in producing the short film focusing on the personal love for

the land that empowered a group of dedicated conservationists, some of whom used personal assets as collateral to help arrange the \$16 million purchase.

The goal of the film is to enhance public understanding of the importance of local land conservation, clean drinking water, native wildlife habitats and scenic beauty in the Blue Ridge Mountains, and will be part of a public awareness campaign highlighting Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy’s 15th anniversary during 2009.

The federally funded Blue Ridge Heritage Area grants support diverse initiatives across the North Carolina mountains and foothills, focusing on craft, music, natural heritage, Cherokee traditions and agriculture.

The grants are aimed at local heritage development plans prepared by volunteer heritage councils in each of the 25 counties in the focus area.

SUSTAINABILITY AWARD GOES TO BILL JONES

Bill Jones, left, a 16-year maintenance mechanic at Jockey’s Ridge State Park, receives a Sustainability Award from Bill Ross, former secretary of the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources. Jones won the individual award for creation of a stormwater harvesting system for washing park vehicles and landscaping.



‘PARK’ IT

WITH A STATE PARKS
SPECIALTY LICENSE TAG

The Division of Motor Vehicles is accepting applications and payment for these special license plates. There is a \$30 fee in addition to regular license fees (\$60 for personalized plates). Additional fees support conservation through the Parks and Recreation and Natural Heritage trust funds.



**Information at www.ncparks.gov
or www.ncdot.org/dmv**



CEREMONIAL CHIEF ELIJA LOCKLEAR OF THE TUSCARORA NATION CIRCLED THE SITE AND THE CROWD WITH PLANTS SMOULDERING IN AN ABALONE SHELL IN A 'SMUDGING CEREMONY.'

PARK PROJECT GETS SPECIAL BLESSING

History was recalled and history was made April 3 as members of the Tuscarora Nation helped mark the construction of a visitor center at Cliffs of the Neuse State Park with a traditional "smudging ceremony."

The ceremonial blessing – which accompanied a more traditional groundbreaking – had likely not been performed at that Neuse River landmark of the traditional Tuscarora homeland since at least 1713, according to chiefs.

It was during that period that much of the Tuscarora Nation scattered or were re-settled in the face of European settlement.

"This is not a homecoming for us; we never left. This is recognition we're still here," said "Dreamweaver," who accompanied Principal Chief Cecil Hunt and Ceremonial Chief Elija Locklear at the ceremony.

As "Dreamweaver" spoke, Locklear slowly circled the site and the spectators holding a smoldering abalone shell filled with sweetgrass, sage, tobacco and cedar leaves. He then lead the Lord's Prayer in the Tuscarora language.

The Tuscarora were joined at the ceremony by state parks system staff, friends of the park and more than 100 fourth graders from Carver Elementary School in Mt. Olive.

State representatives Van Braxton and Efton Sager also offered congratulations on the pending construction of a 7,000-square-foot visitor center near the park's lake.

"As a legislator, we do a lot of things we have to do. Doing this is something we want to do," Braxton said. "North Carolina is losing more farmland than any state in the nation. So, it's very important for us to save these parks and add

land to them."

The facility will be similar to visitor centers built at 18 state parks since 1994, featuring an exhibit hall, teaching auditorium and classroom, along with administrative offices for both the park and the state parks system's east district.

It represents an investment of \$2.4 million from the Park and Recreation Trust Fund.

As part of the state parks system's initiative for environmentally friendly construction, the new visitor center is registered as a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) project with the United States Green Building Council.

Some of its features include both active and passive solar energy systems, low-energy, water-source heat pumps and a highly reflective roof surface to reduce summer heat gain. And, the building's sidewalk will feature a cast model of the Neuse River.

Lewis Ledford, state parks director, said that one of the building's primary functions – as at all state parks – is education.

"This visitor center and its exhibit hall will pay tribute to the sense of history that's here," he said. "Importantly, it's a place where we can convey the natural and cultural story of the park and the Neuse River region."

Jim Slye of the Park Advisory Committee noted that Cliffs of the Neuse is one of the older state parks, established in 1945, and a place where many ranger careers began.

"We're all stewards of this park and we're all users of this park. Maybe we can pass along a better resource than we found to these youngsters here today," he said.

'GREEN BUILDING' TOPIC FOR AUTHORITY

North Carolina's state parks system is a leader in the new design and construction process that promotes green building practices and related human and environmental health, an architect familiar with the initiative told the Parks and the Recreation Trust Fund Authority.

"The Division of Parks and Recreation is to be commended for its commitment to LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification and practices for its facilities," Grimsley Hobbs of Hobbs Architects, P.A. said at the authority's March 20 meeting at Jordan Lake State Recreation Area.

"The agency is on the forefront of a tidal wave of a national and international trend toward sustainability."

Hobbs went on to describe the key LEED components of some recent state park projects and provided detailed background information on the initiative and the certification process. An internal division staff directive calls for all new construction in excess of 5,000 square feet to be LEED certified.

The March meeting was also the first for David Knight, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources' new assistant secretary for natural resources. Knight, who formerly worked with The Nature Conservancy, recently joined the department as part of the new leadership team of Gov. Beverly Eaves Perdue.

"I am keenly aware of our quality state parks system," Knight said. "It is vitally important recreationally, ecologically and economically. We need to remind constituents and the public about all the great work you're doing. It's making a huge difference across our state."

As part of his division update, Director Lewis Ledford said recent administration changes at the state and federal levels and the trying economic conditions present interesting times for the state parks system.

He described recent budget reductions across the system and department reductions affecting the division in Gov. Perdue's proposed budget.

"These are difficult times, and we all need to pitch in and do our best with fewer resources and staff," said Ledford, who told the authority members that encouraging signs are the federal stimulus package and strong support in the Obama administration for re-invigorating the

federal Land and Water Conservation Fund, after which PARTF is partially modeled.

Ledford also reviewed key legislation being considered in the General Assembly and updated the authority on the new centralized reservation system and land acquisition and design and development projects.

Bayard Alcorn, head of the division's Grants and Special Studies Program, provided the authority with an overview of the grant selection process for local government projects, including the factors used to evaluate applications.

He also provided a broad-based description of past recipients and breakdowns by scoring, geographic distribution, the applicant's population and the grant funds requested.

The board will review 2009 applications in May.

John Poole, grant program manager, advised authority members that the division has received 89 applications requesting \$27 million in this year's grant cycle.

At the outset of the meeting, Megan Lynch, superintendent of Jordan Lake State Recreation Area, gave a presentation on the lake's history, the facilities available to the public, significant natural resources and ecological conditions, management and operational issues associated with one of the division's most visited units.

HCC AIDS ELK KNOB

The High Country Conservancy completed four land protection projects in 2008 in partnership with Elk Knob State Park, adding 62 acres to the park.

Residents of the local community in Watauga County were crucial to the success of the projects with four families working closely with the conservancy, said Eric Hiegel, the land protection director.

"While 62 acres is not a lot of land, these projects were crucial to the growing park," Hiegel said. "These projects were supported by the community because they wanted to keep this mountain as it is."

Park Superintendent Larry Trivette said, "The views these projects protect are beautiful, but the protected land is also strategically significant for the future shape of the park. The local families who worked with have benefited the park now and well into the future."

LAMBERT WILL LEAD OPERATIONS STAFF

Mike Lambert, a 16-year veteran park ranger and superintendent, has been promoted to chief of operations for the state parks system.

Lambert will be responsible for park operations, resource management, environmental education programming, law enforcement, safety and facility maintenance for the state's system of 33 state parks, four state recreation areas and 17 state natural areas covering more than 200,000 acres.

"Mike is one of a new generation of state park administrators who has gained exceptional experience as a ranger

and park superintendent," said Lewis Ledford, director of state parks. "The state parks system will benefit from his leadership skills as it continues to grow through conservation initiatives, develops its environmental education program and continues to serve about 13 million visitors each year.

Lambert is a native of Ashe County and graduated



from the University of North Carolina-Charlotte in 1993, earning a bachelor's degree in earth science. He began his career with the state parks system in 1993 as a ranger at New River State Park and later served at Mount Jefferson State Natural Area.

In 1999, Lambert was the first ranger appointed to the new Gorges State Park, later served as ranger at Stone Mountain State Park and was named superintendent at Elk Knob State Natural Area. He became superintendent of New River State Park in 2004. He is a certified environmental educator.

FRIENDS SUPPORT POETRY CONTEST

More than 250 young Ashe County poets began working on their writing skills last fall as contestants in a local annual poetry competition at Mount Jefferson State Natural Area.

This year's contest was the best yet, according to Ranger Tom Randolph, the organizer, with more poets and a greater variety of styles.

Prizes furnished through the Friends of State Parks include tents, sleeping bags, backpacks and flashlights. The nonprofit group has committed to continue funding the contest for the next five years.

Students use skills required in lessons taught in the standard courses of study. A sixth grade competency goal requires students to "study the characteristics of literary genres (fiction, nonfiction, drama and poetry), and a third grade goal states, "Read a variety of texts including poetry (proverbs, riddles, limericks, simple poems)."

The contest kickoff each year is in late fall when the leaves have all but disappeared. This is the same time of year that Mount Jefferson originally became a state park in 1956, Randolph said. Local people donated land and money for the park, in part, because "they were just so proud of that old mountain."

"We hear that same sense of pride in the voices and poetry of our talented young people

today," he said.

The first-place poet was Autumn Hayes who wrote these lines entitled "Blue Sky Mountains":

BLUE SKY MOUNTAINS

*Run into Mount Jefferson, climb up a tree
Hide in the dark shadows
of you and me.
Ponder and wonder
all through the night
With nothing but the blue mountains
in your sight.*

*Glaring up at the sky so beautiful and blue
Just waiting for us to climb it,
yes, me and you.
Leaves crumbling, rocks tumbling
So peaceful, so quiet.
Nobody here, nobody mumbling
Mountain so quiet, mountain so tall.*

*Never, not in a hundred years will they fall
Squirrels climbing up a tee,
shaking their little tails at me
It's so wonderful,
I wish you could see*

FIRST PHASE COMPLETED AT GORGES

The construction of roads, parking areas and utility infrastructure at Gorges State Park is near completion and the park expects to fully reopen about May 1.

The initial phase of permanent park development, including a four-mile loop road, forced the park to close its Grassy Ridge section, the primary entry point to the park. The Frozen Creek Access at the park's lower elevation has been the only available access since mid-2008.

Funding for the \$6 million infrastructure project came from the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund.

Gorges State Park was dedicated in 1999 following a 7,000-acre land acquisition from Duke Energy Corp. Interim visitor facilities were put in place in 2001.

The next development step is construction of a visitor center, two picnic shelters, restroom facilities and a maintenance compound. Those projects should begin in the fall.

The park is also building three new hiking trails, including a three-mile loop to the popular Rainbow Falls.

A proposed design for the visitor center from Pearce Brinkley Cease + Lee Architects in Asheville won an award recently from the Asheville Chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

The visitor center will include an exhibit hall, auditorium, multi-purpose classroom and administrative offices, and the project architect aims for gold status in the Leadership for Environment and Environmental Design program of the

AT RIGHT IS THE COMPLETED VISITOR CENTER PARKING AREA AT GORGES STATE PARK. A PROPOSED DESIGN FOR THE VISITOR CENTER, BELOW, WON AN ARCHITECTURAL AWARD.



U.S. Green Building Council.

Green building design features being considered are a rainwater harvesting system for irrigation and toilet fixtures, a garden roof and constructed wetlands for stormwater control.

Materials for the design – which has yet to gain approval by state construction officials

– would include concrete floors with radiant solar heating and heavy timber framing.

In its award application, the architectural firm said the design “performs as an instructional tool for sustainable concepts as well as for the essence of the park itself. While the exhibits are in the building, the building is an exhibit.”

SHIMEL, HOLMES TOP INTERPRETERS

Joe Shimel, superintendent at Medoc Mountain State Park, was named Outstanding Interpreter of the Year in the Southeast by the National Association for Interpretation.

And, Becky Holmes, the north district interpretation and education specialist, was named Outstanding New Interpreter.

Shimel and Holmes were presented the awards at

the professional group's regional conference in February at the Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Center in Kentucky.

The awards recognize excellence in interpretation among more than 5,000 employees of parks, museums, zoos, nature centers, aquariums, theme parks and commercial tour operators. The region includes 10 southeastern states.

GRANDFATHER

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

said. "Thanks to the Morton family and our conservation partners, visitors from inside and outside of North Carolina will be able to enjoy the majesty of this wonderful mountain for generations to come."

House and senate authorization bills had a total 47 co-sponsoring legislators. The primary sponsor of Senate Bill 89 was Senator Joe Sam Queen of Haywood County. Primary sponsors of House Bill 128 were representatives Philip Frye of Mitchell County, Edgar V. Starnes of Caldwell County and Cullie M. Tarleton of Watauga County.

An agreement for the state to purchase the undeveloped backcountry portion of Grandfather Mountain was announced in September. Funding for the \$12 million acquisition will come equally from the Parks and Recreation and Natural Heritage trust funds.

Closing on the property is expected later this spring.

"Throughout this process, we've had strong support and help from the General Assembly, our conservation partners and Crae Morton and other officials of grandfather Mountain Inc.," said Lewis Ledford, state parks director.

"Conservation of such a beloved landmark reflects the commitment of many people, including the citizens of North Carolina, who care about the land and support our state parks system and the conservation trust funds, which financed the purchase."

The heirs of company founder Hugh Morton continue to operate the travel destination with its nature center, wildlife habitats and "mile-high" swing-



BACKCOUNTRY INCLUDES TRAIL SYSTEM ALONG MOUNTAIN'S RUGGED RIDGELINE.

ing bridge on a paid admission basis. The acquisition agreement gives the state a conservation easement on 749 acres of the original property where the attraction is located.

Closing on the property is expected to be accompanied by a memorandum of agreement between the attraction and the state parks system for management of the property during the interim until a superintendent can be named and a ranger staff can be placed on the mountain.

The backcountry includes 12 miles of popular hiking trails with access at three points surrounding the mountain, including the Blue Ridge Parkway and its National Park Service trails. And, there is a string of backpack camping sites along the ridgeline.

In the past, the attraction supplied hiking permits to its guests as well as to hikers entering the property from other points. Permits were also available at area businesses.

Permits will continue to be required for hiking and camping, but will only be available at the attraction's entrance gate and at trailheads through

a self-registration process. No fees will be charged for permits during the interim management period.

Patrol of the area likely will be a shared responsibility of Grandfather Mountain Inc. and rangers from Elk Knob State Park near Boone.

The new state park will soon have a presence on the division's Web site, and state parks signs and trailhead displays are being erected on the property.

The acquisition of the Grandfather Mountain property was arranged in 2008 with the help of The Conservation Fund and one of its directors, Mike Leonard. The Nature Conservancy, which holds conservation easements on the mountain and surrounding properties totaling close to 4,000 acres, was also involved in negotiations.

The property lies in Watauga, Avery and Caldwell counties and contains the headwaters of both the Watauga and Linville rivers. Developed as an attraction by Hugh Morton in the 1950s, it boasts 73 rare species and is distinguished by the 5,946-foot Calloway Peak.

marinas (47.8 percent).

Survey results will be included in the updated Systemwide Plan, which in part is designed to identify trends in recreation and suggest ways the parks system can address those.

For the first time, the survey was available online and promoted through the media. Over five weeks, 3,927 people responded either online or with hard copies distributed through some of the parks' citizen advisory committees.

A total 95.2 percent of respondents expressed a desire for an expanded parks system.

Natural resource protection is very important, according to 93.7 percent of respondents who either agreed or strongly agreed that it is important for the division to acquire land to protect natural and scenic resources even if they have to wait for facilities and public access.

Nearly half of respondents (48.3 percent) strongly

agreed that it is important to protect unique natural resources, even if it means limiting public access to some areas.

Interpretation and education is still very important for state park users, with 82.6 percent saying they desire more environmental education opportunities at parks.

Camping in state parks is also an important pastime. The survey revealed that tent/trailer camping without electrical hookups is the most popular camping option. The next most popular is backcountry primitive camping.

Some survey comments reflected a preference for more natural campsites, more space between campsites and separation from RVs and large trailers.

When it came to vacation cabins, more respondents said they'd prefer an improved cabin (with kitchen, heat and restroom) over a rustic type that was just an enclosed living space.

The most frequent com-

plaint among the park users was the lack of a reservations system. (A comprehensive central reservations system is now being implemented for campsites, picnic shelters and other facilities.) The second biggest complaint was the parks system's policy of locking entrance gates at night.

Although the survey was a low-cost method of gaining valuable insight into visitors' opinions, the methodology was not scientific and did not involve random sampling of park users. The survey was tilted toward regular Internet/computer users and may have missed some important user groups such as senior citizens, low-income or rural residents.

Despite its limitations, in several instances, many of the responses matched well with North Carolina data from the USDA Forest Service National Survey on Recreation and the Environment, an industry standard.

NATIONAL LEADERSHIP SCHOOL GRADUATES

THREE NORTH CAROLINA STATE PARK LEADERS WERE AMONG 67 PROFESSIONALS IN THE FIRST GRADUATING CLASS OF THE STATE PARK LEADERSHIP SCHOOL OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE PARK DIRECTORS COORDINATED BY NCSU'S SCHOOL OF PARKS, RECREATION AND TOURISM MANAGEMENT. FROM LEFT ARE MIKE LAMBERT, CHIEF OF OPERATIONS, SUSAN McBEAN, SUPERINTENDENT AT HAW RIVER STATE PARK, SHEDERICK MOLE, SUPERINTENDENT AT JORDAN LAKE STATE RECREATION AREA, AND PHIL MCKNELLY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION. THE SCHOOL WAS HELD IN JANUARY AT OGELBAY RESORT AND CONFERENCE CENTER IN WEST VIRGINIA AND CONCENTRATED ON PARK PLANNING, ADMINISTRATION, OPERATIONS AND MANAGEMENT.



PHOTO BY DALE MACKAY, NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY

MST GAINS FOOTHOLD IN ALAMANCE

The Mountains-to-Sea Trail has gained a firm foothold in Alamance County with the acquisition of a 191-acre parcel on the Haw River dedicated to the trail.

The purchase was a joint effort of the state parks system and Alamance County. Conservation of the property formerly owned by Lon Harris, protects about 4,400 feet of river frontage and provides access to the Haw River about four miles upstream of the county's Indian Valley access.

Though owned by the state, the property will be managed by the county as conservation and recreation land.

"This is a milestone in the creation of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail in central North Carolina. We've known all along that creating this trail wouldn't be possible without partnerships of state and local governments, volunteers and conservation groups," said Lewis Ledford, state parks director. "Alamance County has been among the first to step forward and help us to see real progress."

The N.C. Parks and Recreation Trust Fund provided funding to the state parks system for the land purchase. In 2008, the trust fund awarded a matching grant directly to Alamance County to acquire other recreation property on the Haw River within the Mountains-to-Sea Trail corridor. Similar local grants have recently targeted trail development in Guilford and Johnston counties.

"On behalf of the County of Alamance, we are very excited to be a part of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail project," said Linda Massey, county commissioner chair. "The Haw River is a vital resource historically in Alamance County and especially in the small town of Haw River."

"The creation of this trail can be very beneficial for many small towns that the river runs through as more and more land is designated and developed as recreational. We look forward to continuing our partnership with the other counties involved in this project."

Nearly half of the 1,000-mile Mountains-to-Sea Trail has been dedicated, most of that in western North Carolina on public lands. In 2001, the trail was formally authorized as a unit of the state parks system, a step that allows the state to acquire land for its development under the direction of the division's State Trails Program.

A broad partnership with the division



THE ALAMANCE COUNTY ACQUISITION PROTECTS ABOUT 4,400 FEET OF HAW RIVER FRONTAGE.

and nine local governments in 2006 was formed to develop a Haw River trail reaching nearly 70 miles from Haw River State park in Rockingham County to Jordan Lake. The Mountains-to-Sea Trail will follow the same path for about half that distance.



MST PHOTO WINS AWARD

MOUNT MITCHELL STATE PARK RANGER MATT MUTEL WON AN AWARD FROM NATIONAL RECREATION TRAILS FOR THIS PHOTO TAKEN FROM THE MOUNTAINS-TO-SEA TRAIL IN THE BLACK MOUNTAIN RANGE. THE OCCASION WAS AN OCTOBER GUIDED BACKPACKING TRIP TO COMMEMORATE MOUNTAINS-TO-SEA TRAIL MONTH. THE COLOR VERSION ON OUR WEB SITE WILL SHOW UP THE AUTUMN COLORS. THIS AND OTHER TRAIL PHOTOS ARE ON THE ORGANIZATION'S WEB SITE.

MOUNTAIN HAS TOUGH '09 CHALLENGE

By James Michael Sanders
Mount Mitchell State Park

More than 300 runners from as far away as Massachusetts and Colorado were drawn to the Mount Mitchell Challenge Feb. 28.

The race began at dawn in the welcoming town of Black Mountain. From there, at a starting altitude of 2,360 feet, the runners headed out for whatever challenges the mountains had to offer.

After leaving Black Mountain, they entered the friendly, historic town of Montreat and started up the trail system to the Old Toll Road that once brought hundreds of visitors up to Mount Mitchell in the early 1900s by rail.

The racers followed this trail to its terminus at Black Mountain Gap (5,340 feet) on the Blue Ridge Parkway where half were already expecting to turn around to finish the Black Mountain Marathon at Lake Tomahawk.

The other half were expecting to continue to the summit, but at 10 a.m., the decision was made to start turning challenge contestants around because of adverse weather

FRIENDS ARRANGE FOR CART

Friends of State Park rode to the rescue of volunteer staff at Stone Mountain State Park, helping with the purchase of an electric utility cart for campground hosts.

The park's campground doubled in size in 2006, and the expansion included a new area for recreational vehicles.

Ted Smith of the Alleghany County Sheriff's Office saw the need and launched the proj-



RAIN TURNED TO WINTRY MIX AS RUNNERS NEARED MOUNTAIN SUMMIT.

conditions. By that time, 74 runners had already passed that checkpoint to endure temperatures in the mid to upper thirties and a soaking rain.

Upon reaching the summit at 6,684 feet and gaining 4,324 feet in elevation in the first 20 miles of the 40-mile challenge, many of the runners were surprised to find rain had turned to a wintry mix of snow and freezing rains. And, 50 mph winds threatened hypothermia and drove about a dozen from the competition.

Race Director Jay Curwen said, "These are the worst

conditions we have seen in the history of the race."

Few took the time to take in the view and admire the recently finished observation deck on the summit. Instead, they turned around at the grave of Dr. Elisha Mitchell, the man who first measured the mountain and provided a name.

At the end, 64 runners finished the challenge. Winners were Mark Lundblad, 40, of Swannanoa, who finished in five hours, 10 minutes, and Cynthia Arnold, 25, of Lexington, Ky., who finished in six hours, five minutes.

Rangers and other park staff received notes from the competitors after the race with thanks for their help in keeping everyone safe.

Congratulations to all challenge competitors for enduring the hardships on their journey. Special thanks go to race founders Wendell Begley and Trent Thomas, Race Director Curwen, volunteers and EMS and fire department support crews on standby for making the challenge a success.

BOOK PROMOTES LAND CONSERVATION

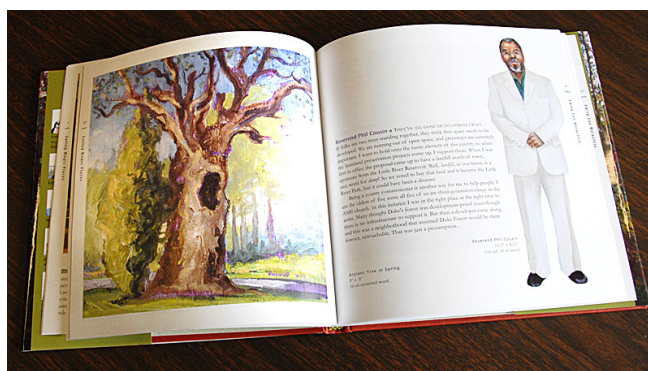
A Durham artist has created a novel way to raise funds for conservation organizations across the state, stitching together art, storytelling and a passion for conservation.

Emily Weinstein created her book "Saving Magic Places" after being swept into an effort to conserve a 44-acre parcel of forest near her neighborhood. The property that was put up for sale by Duke University eventually became part of the county-owned New Hope Creek Park Preserve.

Weinstein promotes the book – and conservation causes – with fundraising events, giving visual presentations of the book and telling the story of the successful grassroots project.

The National Committee for the New River and the Blue Ridge Rural Land Trust have held the events. Both have partnered with the state parks system on conservation projects in Ashe and Alleghany counties.

The nonprofit group holding such an event gets \$10 for each book sold and a Weinstein landscape painting of property either protected or in the process of acquisition for conservation. Up to \$3,000 has been raised at such events, Wein-



BOOK COMBINES ART WITH CONSERVATION STORY.

stein said, mostly through direct donations that spring from networking at the events.

"Saving Magic Places" features paintings of the New Hope conservation tract as well as portraits of 27 of the people involved in its conservation. In the book, people tell the story in their own words drawn from interviews conducted by Weinstein and fellow artist Alice Griffin.

The effort benefited from a \$1 million Clean Water Management Trust Fund grant as well as \$200,000 contributed through private fundraising.

JUNIOR RANGER PROGRAM EXPANDS

The Friends of State Parks continues to foster the next generation of park enthusiasts by working with the interpretation and education program of the state parks system to expand the Junior Ranger program.

Earlier this year, new Junior Ranger activity workbooks were sent to South Mountains, Carolina Beach and Pettigrew state parks. New Junior Ranger patches were designed for New River State Park and Jordan Lake State Recreation Area.

Currently, there are eight Junior Ranger programs in the state parks system, all funded by the volunteer organization.

The program will continue to expand in 2009 with new books and patches to be



EACH STATE PARK JUNIOR RANGER PATCH FEATURES UNIQUE DESIGN.

printed for Pilot Mountain, Fort Macon and Lake Waccamaw state parks. Early planning is also under way to develop Junior Ranger summer camps

and a newsletter.

The Junior Ranger program was designed to engage young children in experiential learning at the state parks.

BARNES ENDS JOCKEY'S RIDGE CAREER

Driven by unrelenting coastal winds, the sands of Jockey's Ridge State Park may always be on the move. But wherever the park goes, George Barnes is going with it.

"He's indelibly etched there. He'll always be a part of Jockey's Ridge State Park," said Ranger Debo Cox upon Barnes' retirement after 31 years with the state parks system.

About 150 friends and colleagues gathered in Nag's Head March 6 to celebrate a career that stretched back nearly as far as the park's history.

Alongside park rangers and superintendents was a large contingent of the Friends of Jockey's Ridge, an advocacy group that had its roots in the early efforts to preserve the dune system in the 1970s as People to Preserve Jockey's Ridge.

Barnes' tenure as steward of the 426-acre park was bound to the preservation effort, and he was an effective liaison between the advocates and the parks system, said Lewis Ledford, director of the state parks. "Jockey's Ridge was such a good example of folks coming together to make the park happen. So much good has happened because of that civic engagement."

Barnes is a native of Lumberton and a 1976 graduate of UNC-Wilmington with a bachelor's degree in history.

Soon after joining the state parks system as a ranger at Goose Creek State Park in 1978, he was sent to Jockey's Ridge two or three days a week because the park's first ranger left the job. He was to pick up trash and maintain an official state presence. Then in 1980,



BARNES, RIGHT, ACCEPTS DIVISION PLAQUE FROM HIS SUPERVISOR ADRIAN O'NEAL

he jumped at the chance to stay there permanently.

At first, he was given a truck and a telephone that he plugged into a circuit box. That was the park headquarters until Carolista Fletcher Baum, a leader of the preservation movement, loaned him a small trailer.

In the mornings and late afternoons, Barnes would sit in the truck with the heat on and the window rolled down to listen for phone calls from Raleigh on the phone in the temporary office.

In a few months, he was joined by his first staff member, Henry Stokes, who eventually retired as superintendent of Dismal Swamp State Park.

Ledford said Barnes often employed a "unique style of diplomacy" in dealing with issues. One of the first was relationships with south-side neighbors as winds blew dune sands onto adjacent properties and threatened homes.

Barnes worked with natural resource managers to devise a system of trucking the sand back to the park's northern edge and taking care

to protect the dune's sparse vegetation.

The park's popularity – regularly drawing more than a million visitors a year – brought other headaches such as traffic and encroachment by development.

Cliff Phillips, retired east district superintendent and one of Barnes' former bosses, said, "George just outlasted many problems... We had an entire town of people that wanted to help run Jockey's Ridge State Park, but George knew what Jockey's Ridge should look like."

During his tenure, the park opened one of the system's first modern visitor centers with an exhibit hall and established one of the system's strongest series of interpretive programs. Multiple programs are staged nearly every day in the vacation season, and many of them are at capacity.

Barnes helped launch an oyster reef construction program using volunteers and oyster shell recycling efforts. And, he helped pave the way for the system's first wind turbine project, now in the design stage.

BLAND HONORED WITH ANNUAL AWARD

Along with praise from his peers and a presentation of the Order of the Long Leaf Pine, the state's highest civilian honor, retiring Hammocks Beach State Park Ranger Sam Bland has been honored in a unique way by the Town of Swansboro.

The Onslow County town next to the coastal park has established an annual community service award in Bland's name.

The Samuel Swann Bland Outstanding Community Service Award will be given each year to a public employee or community volunteer who "demonstrates the outstanding dedication to the improvement of community services that has been exhibited in the career and contributions of Samuel Swann Bland."

Bland retired March 1 after a 28-year career with the state parks system as both a ranger and park superintendent. He was known throughout the Division of Parks and Recreation for his commitment to the agency's mission and innovative work in natural resource protection and environmental education.

"Sam Bland has exemplified everything to which a public servant should aspire," said Swansboro Mayor Scott Chadwick. "His diligent work, leadership and dedication have been crucial to the preservation and enhancement of the beautiful natural resource that is Hammocks Beach State Park."

Since Bland came to the state park as superintendent in 1986, it has grown from a three-acre presence on the mainland and the three-mile-



BLAND LEADS A GROUP OF EXPERT BIRDERS ON A TOUR OF BEAR ISLAND.

long Bear Island to include 33 acres on the mainland as well as Jones Island and Huggins Island. During his tenure, a new visitor center was built and replacement of an island bathhouse was begun.

In 2003, Bland chose to step down as superintendent and resumed ranger duties under Superintendent Paul Donnelly.

A native of Atlantic Beach, Bland graduated from East Carolina University in 1980 with a bachelor's degree in parks, recreation and conservation and worked as a seasonal employee at Fort Macon State Park under then-superintendent Scott Daughtry.

Bland became a fulltime ranger in 1980, worked as acting superintendent at Jordan Lake State Recreation Area and superintendent at Eno River State Park before being posted at Hammocks Beach.

After resuming duties as a ranger, Bland began a series of intensive natural resource projects at the park. He worked to improve professional and volunteer monitoring programs for nesting sea turtles and colonial shore birds.

He developed a "living shoreline" program, overseeing

the replacement of more than 100 feet of hardened bulkhead with a marsh grass habitat that provides nursery areas for aquatic life as well as better protection against tides and storms.

Bland designed and initiated a project to remove much of a paved parking area at a maintenance compound, replacing it with natural areas and stormwater catch basins to slow erosion. It was augmented by a rainwater harvesting system.

He also nurtured a oyster shell recycling program and began building an oyster shell reef.

In 2008, Bland was presented a Pelican Award from the North Carolina Coastal Federation for protection of coastal habitat as well as an Outstanding Public Citizen Award from Rotary International.

Mayor Chadwick added, "Our community has become a significant tourism and recreational attraction – and Hammocks Beach State Park has become a major asset to Swansboro, Onslow County and the Crystal Coast – in large part due to the stewardship of Sam Bland."

NORTH CAROLINA STATE PARKS

MONTHLY ATTENDANCE REPORT

DECEMBER, 2008

NC STATE PARK	December 2008	TOTAL YTD Dec-08	December 2007	TOTAL YTD Dec-07	% CHANGE (2008/2007) Dec YTD	
Carolina Beach	22,168	464,838	24,056	532,086	-8%	-13%
Chimney Rock	6,891	206,626	0	0	-100%	-100%
Cliffs of the Neuse	5,253	127,571	4,570	134,905	15%	-5%
Crowders Mountain	17,946	349,389	20,210	404,143	-11%	-14%
Dismal Swamp	2,182	33,754	0	0	-100%	-100%
Elk Knob	320	6,004	0	0	-100%	-100%
Eno River including Occoneechee Mountain	18,506	414,301	22,947	406,905	-19%	2%
Falls Lake	13,302	788,843	16,521	888,173	-19%	-11%
Fort Fisher	14,248	667,818	13,828	834,544	3%	-20%
Fort Macon	47,116	1,181,234	43,710	1,214,866	8%	-3%
Goose Creek	10,354	177,933	9,966	170,707	4%	4%
Gorges	1,113	17,489	4,428	140,495	-75%	-88%
Hammocks Beach	4,881	124,374	4,137	117,966	18%	5%
Haw River	542	26,170	1,080	24,516	-50%	7%
Hanging Rock	12,818	447,689	15,434	474,455	-17%	-6%
Jones Lake	1,194	63,696	1,889	69,974	-37%	-9%
Jordan Lake	38,540	810,869	26,361	1,190,973	46%	-32%
Jockey's Ridge	34,574	1,403,781	30,571	1,515,734	13%	-7%
Kerr Lake	38,632	1,154,164	36,924	1,148,632	5%	0%
Lake James	12,271	375,108	15,984	383,566	-23%	-2%
Lake Norman	23,892	493,365	27,342	523,008	-13%	-6%
Lake Waccamaw	3,984	72,802	3,159	85,657	26%	-15%
Lumber River	5,052	80,304	3,132	80,548	61%	-0%
Merchants Millpond	14,632	227,977	10,814	150,019	35%	52%
Medoc Mountain	2,628	56,697	2,592	57,615	1%	-2%
Mount Mitchell	3,568	181,924	2,824	316,708	26%	-43%
Morrow Mountain	12,360	380,220	14,940	401,800	-17%	-5%
New River including Mount Jefferson	10,766	267,993	10,203	287,133	6%	-7%
Pettigrew	3,237	60,599	4,144	66,551	-22%	-9%
Pilot Mountain	13,366	390,345	15,464	404,360	-14%	-3%
Raven Rock	6,336	121,577	5,288	100,426	20%	21%
Singletary Lake	490	29,668	1,958	33,035	-75%	-10%
South Mountains	7,322	178,780	11,858	198,845	-38%	-10%
Stone Mountain	13,676	326,968	14,112	467,214	-3%	-30%
Weymouth Woods	3,693	50,285	3,754	49,770	-2%	1%
William B. Umstead	56,967	722,732	32,158	612,411	77%	18%
SYSTEMWIDE TOTAL	484,820	12,483,887	456,358	13,487,740	6%	-7%



Our Mission Remains...

to protect North Carolina's **natural diversity**;
to provide and promote **outdoor recreation**
opportunities throughout North Carolina;
to exemplify and encourage **good stewardship**
of North Carolina's natural resources for all
citizens and visitors.

*Funds for printing this issue of The Steward were generously
provided by the nonprofit Friends of Fort Macon.*

SAFETY ZONE

THINK AHEAD FOR SAFETY ON WATER

✓Boaters and those who use wave runners should refresh themselves on boating safety before launching for the first time in a season.

✓North Carolina boating laws require a personal flotation device for each rider. Check them beforehand for deterioration.

✓Check expiration dates on flares and fire extinguishers.

✓Check trailer lights and tires and lubricate wheelbearings.

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